

Meeting of the New Jersey Commission of Italian and Americans of Italian Heritage

January 15, 2003

Minutes

The meeting was hosted in room 209 of the State House in Trenton, NJ

Attendance:

Commissioners

Voting Members

Larry Paragano
Gilda Rorro Baldassari
Richard Bilotti
Mauro Checchio
Rinaldo D'Argenio
Robert Prunetti
Marisa Trubiano
Laura Sanguineti White
Catherine Vignale

Staff

Robert Freda, Executive Director
Frank Gargione, Advisor
Terry McIntyre, Governor's representative
Vita Semeraro, Office Manager

Public

Joseph Coccia, UNICO National
Larry Delollo, Camden Community College Professor
Diane Kubinski, Department of Education
Mel Perci, UNICO
Jo Shenman
John Simone, NIAF
Peter Tarquinio, Italia-Oggi

Agenda:

I. & II. Call to Order by the presiding Chair and Attendance

Larry Paragano, chair, called the meeting to order at 3:25 p.m.

III. Public Portion Guests

Mel Perci, National Chairman of UNICO, presented draft resolutions for the following matter. This February he will ask permission to encourage the Governor to create a stamp honoring John Basilone. He asked the Commission to support the petition by signing the resolution.

Gilda introduced videographer, Jo Shenman, Peter Tarquinio from Italia Oggi, and John DiSimone from NIAF. She then asked Peter Tarquinio to speak.

Peter Tarquinio introduced his youth initiative by reporting a few events organized by Italia Oggi. They had a wine tasting party, which was very successful. His group has over 300 members, both paid and unpaid. They also have a series of events scheduled for next year such as cooking, golf, museum visits, etc. He added that Italia Oggi is currently looking for a physical establishment; they might be using Princeton Italian American Sports Club's facilities. They are also currently working with the Higher Education Committee, in particular with Marisa Trubiano towards a mentoring program to help new Italian college graduates.

Gilda applauded Tarquinio's efforts and thanked Joe DiSimone and Robert Freda for their commitment to all of these activities.

Larry congratulated Peter's input and stated that youth is the future.

Freda added that one of our goals is to have young people join Italian American organizations throughout New Jersey. In this direction, Italia Oggi is a model resource for cultural activities.

Peter Tarquinio invited everyone to check their website at www.italia-oggi.org to see the events schedule and some pictures and encourages all young people to join.

Gilda then asked videographer Joe Shenman to speak about the Columbus Day event.

Shenman said that she videotaped the entire event including the parade. She received an extraordinary response and keeps receiving requests for the video. The video was televised in the New York, New Jersey, and Trenton area. She then distributed some extra copies and invited everyone to play it in public places.

Freda added that a digital photo from the video was placed in the newsletter and that the film represents a tremendous living document. Freda then introduced Professor Larry Delollio, who is the permanent liaison between the Camden County Community College and our commission.

Delollio said that his school is located in Blackwood, New Jersey and counts over fifteen thousand students, many of which are second, third, and fourth generation Italian Americans. He added that Italian Americans are a well-established group in Camden County. He would also like to receive more information and a copy of the video and is will to help in any way to proliferate Italian culture.

Coccia said that one of UNICO's priorities is to bring back Italian language and culture to the community. Some UNICO organizations give money to schools for books and other school supplies.

Freda suggested that we link their websites to ours. Since we are not here to replace already existed initiatives, but to cooperate with them.

Gilda added that she spoke to Contini and invited him to attend one of our meetings.

Larry Paragano said he met with Judge Garibaldi and Frank Guerini at NIAF and received a positive feedback stating that they would like to cooperate with the commission.

Robert Prunetti suggested that the commission should be as forceful as possible with NIAF. In his experience, NIAF representatives were very irresponsible.

John Simone agreed that NIAF executives are very skeptical when it comes to supporting Italian American events. He mentioned that during a teleconference event, Jim Farina mentioned our commissions' efforts. Simone and Gilda spoke to Jim Farina to update him on what the commission has been involved in to and he promised support.

IV. Approval of previous meeting minutes

Robert Freda stated that since we did not reach the quorum, the October minutes would be approved at the March 19th meeting.

V. Chairman Report

Larry Paragano stated that he is confident that NIAF is willing to cooperate. He said that Freda is finalizing a list of the commission's accomplishments to date. He then listed some of the projects and activities the Commission is involved in.

- He and Freda met with the Governor and he seems to be supportive.
- They also met with Dr. Joseph Seneca, Vice President of Rutgers University, to discuss the possibility of building a Casa Italiana on the New Brunswick Campus. During that meeting, he submitted a wish list to the architects, who have already contacted him to further develop that list. Larry Paragano also added that it is important that we are financially prepared to make this project a reality.
- The Commission is co-sponsoring an event called "Italian Hours" at Rutgers University. The event is scheduled for the 2nd week of April and it will include concerts and various exhibits. He invites the public to come to the opening ceremony.
- The Commission, together with the Community Outreach Committee, is planning a convocation on March 8th at the State Museum in Trenton. He invited present organization leaders to share their mailing lists with us, so that we can invite as many people as possible. The plan is to invite the Leaders from each organization to the March 8th event and then invite all their organization members to the April events.
- The Commission is in the process interviewing representatives from a few PR firms in order to provide more visibility to our projects.

V. Executive Director Report

Robert Freda read the following report:

“New Jersey Italian and Italian American Heritage Commission and Institute

Projects and Program Report 2002 - 2003

Established, staffed and operating two offices:

1. Commission – New Jersey Department of Education, Trenton NJ
2. Institute, Rutgers University, New Brunswick

Hired: Full Time Office Manager/Coordinator
Part Time Executive Director for Program Development and Administration

Administration of Budget in cooperation with Department of Education

Established data bases for client communication – E Mail, regular mail Organizations, Schools, Universities, Individuals

Enacted By Laws and Incorporation documents of the Commission and Institute

Organized and Conducted seven public meetings of the Commission
Working meetings with Government Officials and with Governor McGreevey

Creation. Printing, Mailing and distribution of first newsletter to 200 Italian American Civic Organizations in NJ

Attended Recognition ceremony for Commission at Drumthwacket Governor’s Mansion for Columbus Day Celebration, October 2003.

Speaking engagements: New Jersey Association of Italian Teachers, NJEA Affiliate

Appointed officers and Established Organizational meetings of the Institute Board

Established and conducted meetings of Board of Academic Advisors to the Institute

Established and conducted meetings of the Committee on Higher Education

Collaboration in organizing and participation in meetings of the NJ Italian Italian American Heritage Foundation

Meetings with Italian Consulate of Philadelphia, Vice Consulate of Newark, Consulate of NY
Curriculum Workshops: with Calandra Institute Officials CUNY

Working sessions Curriculum Committee - development New Jersey School Curriculum Project
With New Jersey Department of Education

Recruitment and retention of writers for Curriculum Guides. Communication with all School District Superintendents in New Jersey.

Working sessions with Community Relations Committee – Organizational meeting of the Advisory Council to the Commission, planned Advisory Council meeting for March 8, 2003.

Co-sponsoring and planning of “Italian Hours” ten day celebration activities and programs at Rutgers University Italian Cultural Heritage – April 2003.

Co-sponsor Italian Music Concert with Mercer County CIAO, May 23, 2003
Richardson Auditorium, Princeton University.

Established Web site – [www. njitalia.nj.gov](http://www.njitalia.nj.gov) – on line needs study report conducted

Production and dissemination of newsletter and brochure - Winter 2003

Collaboration with Rutgers University Italian Studies Initiative Committee – to participate and assist in the formation of an Italian American Studies major at the state university

Collaboration with Rutgers University – Future Facilities Planning Committee – Casa Italiana

Meetings with Rutgers University – Business and Administration officials to establish internal accounting procedures for receipt and disbursement of non-government funding.

Collaboration with “Oggi In Italia” Italian Youth Group and Italian American Civic Organizations to develop civic participation in existing Italian American Organizations

Re Publication of book “The Italians of New Jersey, A history and bibliography.”

Co sponsoring of new publication with Rutgers Press: an Anthology of works by Writers on subjects dealing with the Italian Experience in NJ

* Planning stages:

*Film Documentary with New Jersey Network – The Italians of New Jersey

*Staff expansion: Retention of: public relations consultant, full time Executive Director for the Institute, Funding and Development Consultant

*International Museum Exhibit Exchange between New Jersey Museums and provincial or regional museums from Italy

*Teacher training recruitment programs with Italian Consulates of Newark and New York.

*Post baccalaureate Research and Study scholarships

*Spring Concert at Rutgers University, Creation of Speakers Bureau”

VII. Treasurer Report

Robert Freda announced that we spent over 76 thousand dollars so far. The remaining will be dedicated to the education project. Our main flagship will be to produce curricula for use in the public schools of New Jersey.

VIII. Committee Reports

Development and Funding Committee

From now on, anyone from the public that wishes to submit a project to the Commission, will have to fill out a standard form that we are in the process of creating. After the Commission approves the project, it will endorse the concept to the foundation, which will then make the final decision.

Larry Paragano added that Peter Coccoziello will send a letter to people in financial arena who can afford to commit \$5,000 per year. He will have a gala to gather people with monetary funds. We have a number of projects in the works such as the reprinting of a book, and the co-sponsoring of a collection of short stories by Italian American female writers.

School Curriculum and Education Committee Report

Gilda exposed the various components of the project of promoting Italian Cultural Heritage in programs throughout the K-12 system. Essential to this project is the need to prepare teachers. There will be a meeting hosted by Janis Jensen with the New York Italian Consul on January 30, 2003. A memo of understanding between the NJ Department of Education and the New York Italian Consulate will be discussed as well as possible financial support from the Consulate to NJ schools. She added that there is a shortage of Italian teachers and we might have to have teachers come from abroad.

One of the long-range goals of the Curriculum Projects is to prepare an illustrated set of materials in kit form relating to the universality of Italian Culture. We are in the process of recruiting Curriculum writers. The Department of Education sent out letters to all school districts inviting teachers to apply for this project. She concluded that this curriculum-writing project is very demanding, and it is thanks to the hard work of many people that it is being developed. It is foreseen that there might be a need for hiring someone to administer the project.

Freda said that the main expenditure from ongoing public funding is the funding of Curriculum and Education projects. It is essential that the pilot schools are successful, because then all the resources can be re-used and they can become a model for others to emulate.

Diane Kubinski added that the Department of Education just revised the curriculum content standards and reminded that all curricula have to comply to these standards in order to be implemented.

Community Outreach Committee Report

Richard Bilotti says he is working with Frank Gargione and Elaine Poiani on the March 8th Convocation. He let Frank Gargione report.

Frank Gargione stated that they just sent invites to over two hundreds Italian American Organizations. They plan on inviting one or two individuals from each organization to the March 8th Convocation in Trenton, and then invite their whole organization to the Italian Hours event at Rutgers.

Higher Education Commission Report

Marisa Trubiano stated that the Higher Education commission had its first meeting on January 8th. She thanked those present for participating. She then summarized some of the ideas that were formulated at the meeting, such as the creation of resource centers for students and teachers to guarantee teachers are at the level that they should be; the creation of professional development series and scholarships and grants. She then added that there is a shortage of specialized teachers and one of the activities of the Committee would be to help recruiting teachers, maybe by training people to administer the Oral Proficiency Tests, or by have young teachers go and make presentations using curricula training models. In our future meetings we will try to prioritize and pick three tasks to further develop. She finally mentioned the initiative of professional mentoring programs, born in collaboration with Italia Oggi, which could serve as a tool to involve young people.

Larry added that basically these are individual committees who have people outside of the Commission, not to mention the incredible enthusiasm that these people have.

Gilda added that we are lucky because we have the support of the Department of Education, which is not easy to get. She added that we are very fortunate to have their staff people working with us (such as John Daugherty). She also mentioned that people from New York have also been very helpful and resourceful.

International and Public Awareness Committee Report

Rinaldo D'Argenio stated that the purpose of this Committee is to foster public awareness and appreciation for Italian products and cultural and other contributions. He mentioned the possible involvement with the magazines "La Cucina Italiana"; "La Compagnia di Bacco" and the corporation "Ferraro Foods". He also mentioned the possibility of organizing loans of collections from minor Italian Museums to either the Rutgers Museum or the Sate Museum. Finally, he stated that New Jersey is home of many Italian manufacturers (i.e. Ferrari) and that contact should be made.

Frank Gargione, Robert Freda and Larry Paragano all observed how the museum exchange project could be easily undertaken and suggested that we should proceed and organize an exposition for the Italian Hours.

Sensitivity Awareness Committee Report

Cathy Vignale read the draft statement of the Committee. A few changes were made and all agreed that the Commission should not waste time trying to fight against stereotypes. The best way to defeat negative images is through education.

Resolutions

Freda stated that even though Angelo Morresi could not be here today, he gave him two important resolutions that need to be approved. He said that Larry Paragano sent letters to all of you commissioners asking some of you whether you would like to be suggested for reappointment. He then asked D'Argenio to read the resolutions.

D'Argenio read the first resolution requesting the Governor to reappoint Laura S. White and Richard Bilotti as the Academic appointment; the Senate to reappoint Salvatore Davino; the Speaker to reappoint Tina Segali; the Senate President to appoint Seneca to fill the unexpired term of Lawrence Silvi.

Richard Bilotti asked whether this appointment would put Seneca in a conflict of interest position.

Rinaldo D'Argenio suggested that Seneca could refuse to vote on certain issues.

Larry Paragano stated that we do not know what the new President at Rutgers will do, chances are that Seneca may no longer be Vice-President and that would be better for us.

Everyone agreed.

All present voted yes (9 commissioner). Four additional members voted yes by email (Cocoziello, Lazzaro, Segali, Connell). The motion was approved.

Mauro Checchio read the resolution requesting to appoint Nazario Paragano, Sr. as Chairperson of the Commission; Angelo Morresi, Esq. as Vice Chairperson of the Commission; and Gilda Rorro Baldassari as Secretary/Treasurer of the Commission.

D'Argenio seconds it.

All present voted yes (9 commissioner, Executive Director and Advisor). Four additional members voted yes by email (Cocoziello, Lazzaro, Segali, Connell). The motion was approved.

IX. The Italian and Italian American Heritage Institute

Gilda opens the Institute's meeting.

Robert Freda went over the report from William Connell. The report read as follows:

[The members of the Board of Academic Advisors were appointed as authorized by the Commission at its October meeting. Ordinary terms are for three years (although initial appointments have been staggered for the sake of continuity), and the terms are renewable by the Commission. The members of the Board and their terms are:

Initial 1-year terms—ending and renewable 7/31/03

David Del Principe, Dept. of Spanish and Italian, Montclair State Univ.

Roberta Ricci, Dept. of Modern Languages, Seton Hall Univ.

Alessandro Vettori, Dept. of Italian, Rutgers Univ.

Catherine Vignale, Prof. of Italian

(Commissioner w/ academic credentials in Italian Studies to be named)

Initial 2-year terms—ending and renewable 7/31/04

Leonard Barkan, Comparative Literature Dept., Princeton Univ.

William J. Connell, History Dept., Seton Hall Univ.

Edvige Giunta, English Dept., New Jersey City Univ.

Sarolta Takacs, Classics Dept., Rutgers Univ.

Laura Sanguineti White, Italian Dept., Rutgers Univ.

Initial 3-year terms—ending and renewable 7/31/05

Joseph DePierro, Dean, School of Education, Seton Hall Univ.

Fred Gardaphe, English Dept., SUNY Stony Brook

Catherine Puglisi, Art History Dept., Rutgers Univ.

Joseph V. Scelsa, Calandra Institute, Queens College, CUNY

Marisa Trubiano, Dept. of Spanish and Italian, Montclair State Univ.

A first meeting was held at Rutgers University on December 12, 2002.

12 of 15 Board Members were present, as were Larry Paragano, Gilda Rorro Baldassari (Institute Co-Chair), Bob Freda (Executive Director) Frank Gargione (Advisory Council Co-Chair), Joseph Seneca (Rutgers V.P. for Academic Affairs), Marlie Wasserman (Director, Rutgers University Press), Linda Schulze (from Joe Seneca's staff). Vita Semeraro recorded the minutes.

After greetings, introductions and updates on the Institute and the Rutgers Italian Studies initiative, the Board discussed two requests for funding that had been referred to it by Bob Freda and the Institute. The Board endorsed a project to subsidize a Rutgers University Press book that collects the work of Italian American writers from New Jersey. A project to collaborate with a Genoese center for the study of Italian emigration was discussed and further information was requested. It was agreed that the Board of Academic Advisors constituted a good group for evaluating the seriousness and feasibility of educational projects and collaborations, but that a formal connection would have to be made with the Foundation in order to ensure that applications for funding are evaluated in a regular and coherent way. A subcommittee was formed to consider, in conjunction with the Foundation and the Institute, creating a regular process for the evaluation of projects for funding. The Board's next meeting is scheduled for April 25, 10:30 am at Rutgers.]

Bilotti made a motion to adjourn the business meeting. Bob Freda seconded it.

XI. New Business

No new business was discussed.

XI. Conclusions

Mel Perci from UNICO congratulated the Commission for its first birthday. He said that it is remarkable how in only a year the Commission has so much on the table. His advice is to concentrate on specifics and not to take a battle you cannot win.

Larry adjourned the meeting at 5:40pm.

Submitted by

Vita Semeraro